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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000992

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SUBJECT: KABILA VISITS KASAI OCCIDENTAL PROVINCE IN WAKE OF
DEADLY TRAIN WRECKENTAL

REF: A. KINSHASA 932

[1](#)B. KINSHASA 945

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: President Kabila traveled to Kasai Occidental province August 8-10 with a delegation of ministers and provincial authorities, his first visit to the region since his election in October of last year. He visited Kakenge, the site of the August 1 train accident, and the provincial capital Kananga, where he met with survivors and toured several development projects. He announced plans for development initiatives in the region as well as rehabilitation and restructuring of the National Railroad Company (SNCC). He was generally well received by the local population, which was hostile during his last visit in 2006 and voted massively against him in the presidential elections. Although little has improved since Kabila took office, the warm welcome appears due to appreciation for his effort to reach out and hopes he will make good on his promises. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) President Kabila led a delegation of government officials, including the transport, interior, and humanitarian affairs ministers, as well as the governor of Kasai Occidental and other provincial authorities, to the town of Kakenge, where he visited August 8 with survivors of the August 1 train accident that claimed at least 89 lives and injured over 100 (ref A). He met with hospitalized victims and presented his condolences to families whose relatives had died. Acknowledging the poor condition and management of the National Railroad Company (SNCC), Kabila said he would explore avenues to restructure SNCC's management and provide the financial assistance needed to rehabilitate the ailing parastatal.

[1](#)3. (U) Kabila traveled August 9 to Katende, some 40 km from the provincial capital Kananga, where he visited several water and power projects, including the site of a dam at Katende Falls. The dam is expected to supply electricity to the greater part of Kasai Occidental but construction has been delayed due to a lack of funds. Recalling campaign promises, Kabila pledged to improve water and electricity services for the population.

[1](#)4. (U) Accompanied by Governor Tresor Kapuku, Kabila met August 10 with local stakeholders in Kananga, including traditional chiefs and managers of public utility companies, August 10. He also visited the central prison and general hospital, where he met other patients from the train wreck. Surprised by the hospital's lack of basic equipment and supplies, Kabila said in a press conference that efforts would be made to refurbish and restock it. He expressed interest in reconstructing Kananga's soccer stadium. Kabila

concluded his stay by attending a mass in memory of those killed and injured in the train accident. He returned to Kinshasa August 11.

¶5. (SBU) Kabila's visit marks his first trip to the Kasai provinces since a campaign stop in July 2006. Unlike his last visit to the region, when protesting crowds threw rocks at his motorcade, the president was more warmly welcomed this time. He was observed walking through neighborhoods in the mornings and talking with students in the afternoon. MONUC officials in Kananga reported that Kabila seemed, by most accounts, to be engaging comfortably with the local population.

¶6. (U) Kabila's arrival in Kananga followed that of four senators August 7 under a parliamentary mandate to investigate the causes of the train accident. Preliminary investigations led the senators to express concern over the possibility of additional accidents, given SNCC's worn-out equipment.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Kabila's unexpected decision to venture to Kasai Occidental in response to the train accident was opportune, helping divert attention from any government culpability in a region generally hostile to Kabila and his allies. It was also a rare touch of political acumen from the President, who has thus far demonstrated little appreciation for the importance of connecting with ordinary citizens. Kabila himself noted to Ambassador Meece August 14 that the trip had been a success. Little has changed in the province since Kabila took office, and his apparently positive reception can be attributed to a number of factors, including the surprise timing of the visit and the fact that he promised assistance to a region that has long been marginalized or ignored by the central government. End

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